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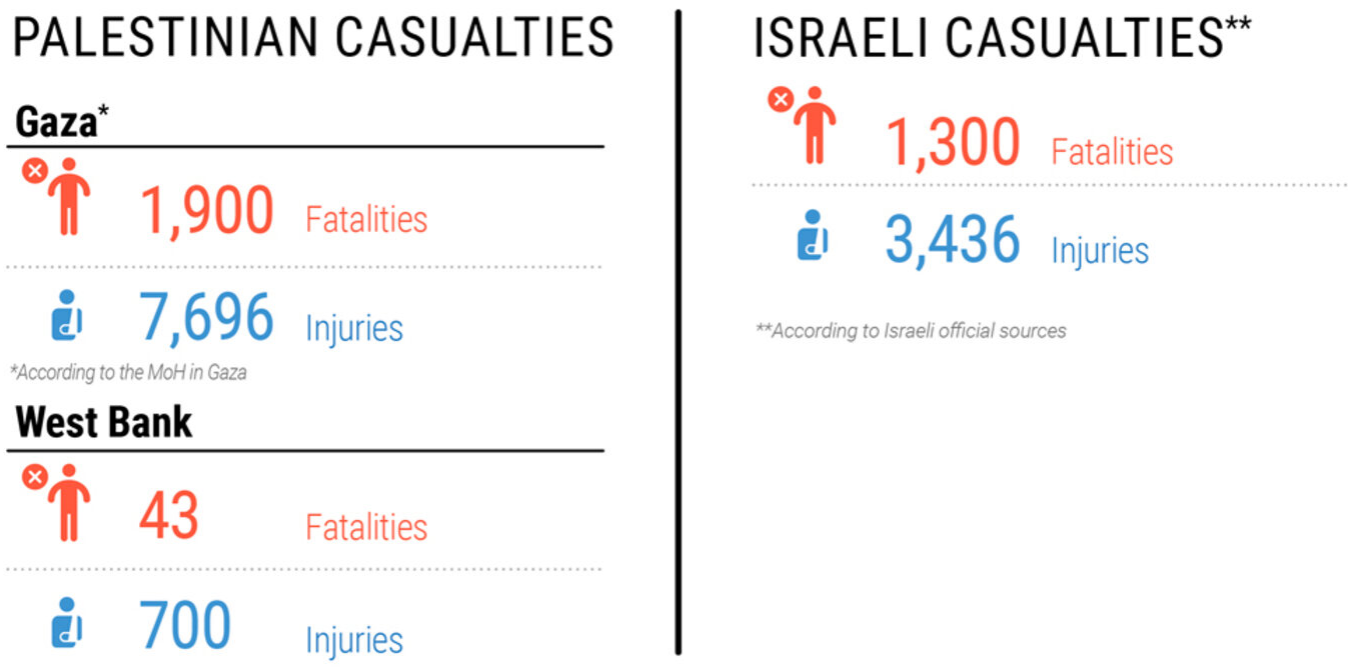
Hostilities in the Gaza Strip and Israel | Flash Update #7

13 Oct 2023

KEY POINTS

- At around midnight on Thursday, the Israeli military ordered about 1.1 million people in the northern part of the Gaza Strip to evacuate southwards within 24 hours, ahead of military operations. As of 21:00, it is estimated that tens of thousands have fled. Prior to the order, over 400,000 Palestinians had been internally displaced due to the hostilities.

- Most people have no access to clean drinking water after supply through the water network and the operation of water desalination/purification plants came to a halt. As a last resort, people are consuming brackish water from agricultural wells, triggering serious concerns about the spread of waterborne diseases.



- Israeli bombardments from the air, sea, and land have continued and intensified across the Gaza Strip for the seventh consecutive day. According to the Ministry of Health in Gaza, between 18:30 on Thursday and 14:00 on Friday, 382 people were killed and 1,120 others injured in Gaza. In total, 1,799 have been killed and 7,388 injured in Gaza since 7 October. Human rights organizations have expressed concerns about incidents where civilians and civilian objects appear to have been directly targeted by Israeli airstrikes.

- Palestinian armed groups in Gaza continued firing of indiscriminate rockets towards Israeli population centres As of 21:00, no new Israeli fatalities have been reported. According to Israeli official sources, at least 1,300 Israelis and foreign nationals have been killed in Israel since 7 October and at least 3,436 have been injured, the vast majority during the initial attack carried out by Palestinian armed groups.

- The Israeli city of Sderot will be completely evacuated within 48 hours, according to Israeli media, and many have reportedly left Ashqelon and other Israeli towns. Previously, mass displacement in southern Israel primarily occurred in small communities in the immediate vicinity to Gaza. The Israeli authorities have been responding to the needs of these IDPs (note: this Flash Update focuses on humanitarian needs in the oPt).

- Since 11 October at 14:00, Gaza has been undergoing a full electricity blackout, which has brought essential health, water and sanitation services to the brink of collapse, and exacerbated food insecurity.

- Between 130 and 150 Israelis, including soldiers and civilians, some of whom are women and children, as well as some foreign nationals, have been captured and forcibly taken into Gaza. The Secretary-General called on Wednesday for the “immediate release of all Israeli hostages.” Hostage-taking is forbidden under International Humanitarian Law.

- Over the past 24 hours, 13 Palestinians, including four children and one woman, were shot and killed by Israeli forces across the West Bank, including East Jerusalem, bringing the Palestinian fatality toll since 7 October to 43.

- Yesterday, the OPT Humanitarian Country Team (HCT) launched a Flash Appeal calling for US$294 million for 77 humanitarian partners to address the most urgent needs of 1,260,000 people in Gaza and the West Bank.

Devastation in the Gaza Strip amid hostilities between armed Palestinian Groups and Israeli forces. Photo by UNRWA

GAZA HUMANITARIAN OVERVIEW

Hostilities and casualties

Heavy Israeli bombardments, from the air, sea and land, have continued almost uninterrupted. Multiple residential buildings in densely populated areas have been targeted and destroyed during the past 24 hours. The Israeli military has claimed to have attacked 12 multi-story buildings within one minute. According to Palestinian media, several residential buildings were hit by airstrikes, including in Jabalia camp, northern Gaza, killing 25 people and injuring dozens of others, in Al Bureij refugee camp, Central Gaza, killing 17 people, and a in Bani Suheila, east of Khan Yunis, killing 13 people and injuring 15 others.

According to the Palestinian Ministry of Health, vehicles of those evacuating the north were hit, killing more than 40 people and injuring 150 others. These incidents prompted many people to abandon their evacuation efforts and return home.

Many casualties are still trapped beneath the rubble, with Palestinian Civil Defense and medical teams unable to access areas due to safety concerns, equipment shortages and streets being severely damaged.

According to the Gaza Ministry of Public Works, 1,324 residential and non-residential buildings, comprising 5,540 housing units, have been destroyed. Another 3,743 housing units have been damaged beyond repair and rendered uninhabitable.

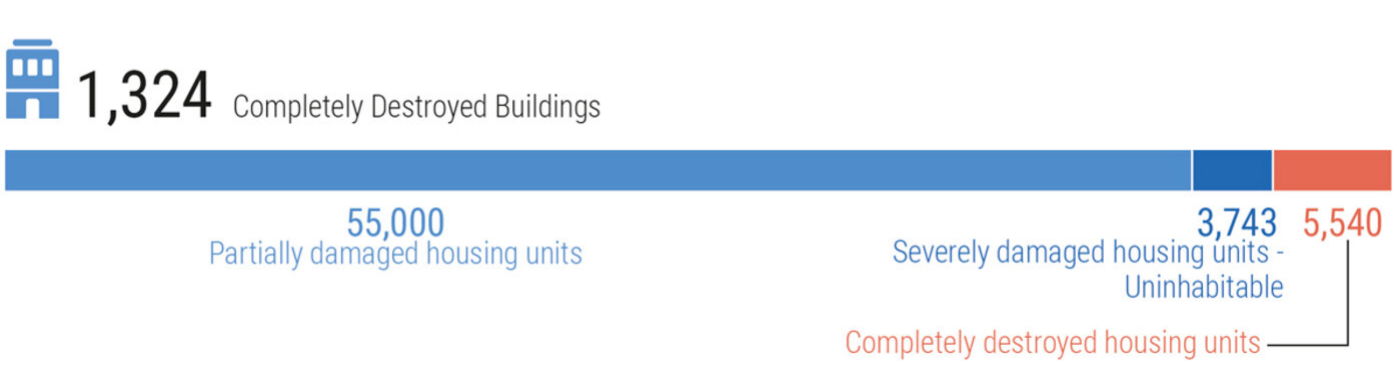
As of 12 October, additional buildings struck and damaged include at least 90 education facilities, including 20 UNRWA schools, two of which were used as emergency shelters for IDPs, and 70 Palestinian Authority (PA) schools, one of which was destroyed. Eleven mosques were targeted and destroyed, and seven churches and mosques were damaged.

Water and sanitation facilities have also been hit by airstrikes. Since the start of hostilities, six water wells, three water pumping stations, one water reservoir, and one desalination plant serving over 1,100,000 people were damaged by airstrikes.

Displacement

Following the recent Israeli evacuation order of northern Gaza, UNRWA indicated that it is no longer in a position to consider their premises in the North of Gaza and in Gaza city are or will remain protected. No safe corridors were initially provided for people to safely comply with the orders to move southwards. Hundreds of people, including families, had to flee on foot. There are concerns about the food security, and access to water, shelter, and health care of the new IDPs.

The spokesperson for Secretary-General Stéphane Dujarric stated: “The United Nations considers it impossible for such a movement to take place without devastating humanitarian consequences. The United Nations strongly appeals for any such order, if confirmed, to be rescinded avoiding what could transform what is already a tragedy into a calamitous situation.” The UN Country Team has issued a statement calling upon the Israeli government to rescind their announcement and further states that, under international law, Israel needs to take precautionary measures in future attacks to limit any harm to civilians and civilian objects.



Currently, the precise scope of internally displaced persons (IDPs) in the Gaza Strip is unknown. On 12 October at 23:00, the cumulative number of IDPs had reached 423,378, with UNRWA hosting around 64 per cent of them in 102 premises operated as designated emergency shelters. This includes - 33,054 IDPs who have taken refuge in 36 PA public schools A. Over 153,000 IDPs, whose homes have been destroyed or damaged, or have left their homes due to fear, are residing with relatives and neighbours, as well as public facilities.

Basic services and livelihoods

Since 11 October at 14:00, Gaza has been under a full electricity blackout, following Israel's halt of its electricity and fuel supply to Gaza on 7 October This triggered the shutdown of Gaza's sole power plant yesterday following depletion of its fuel reserves. According to officials at the Gaza Power Plant, the Israeli authorities warned that the plant would be targeted if it attempted to resume operations.

The Israeli Defense Minister indicated that electricity, fuel and water supply to Gaza will not be restored until Israeli hostages are released. The UN Secretary-General stressed on 11 October that "crucial life-saving supplies, including fuel, food and water, must be allowed into Gaza."

Essential service infrastructure is currently operational via backup generators, which rely on fuel reserves being rapidly depleted. As of 12 October, four out of five of the Gaza wastewater treatment plants had been shut down due to lack of power, and 53 out of 65 sewage pumping stations were not functional, increasing the risk of sewage flooding. In some areas, sewage and solid waste are now accumulating in the streets, posing health and environmental hazards.

All three seawater desalination plants, which had previously produced 21 million litres of drinking water per day, have halted operations. Drinking water supply from Israel was also cut since the evening of 9 October, causing a severe shortage of drinking water for over 650,000 people. As of 12 October, most residents in the Gaza Strip no longer have access to drinking water from service providers or domestic water through pipelines.

The lack of electricity has also had a detrimental effect on food security. It disrupted refrigeration, irrigation, and incubation devices, severely impacting agricultural livelihoods (poultry, cattle, fish, and other products). The increasing number of IDPs has overwhelmed existing resources, leaving many vulnerable families without access to food. Primary food commodities are lacking, such as wheat flour. The food value chain is disrupted, heightening the risk of food insecurity.

All 13 hospitals in the Gaza Strip are partially operational and continue providing treatment for injuries. However, they rely on backup generators with fuel reserves running dangerously low. Hospitals are also facing severe shortages of medical supplies and damage from airstrikes. Hospitals in the northern area face the serious challenge of evacuating patients who are unable to survive without vital support or are physically unable to move. There are also concerns for the safety of staff and patients, as hospital areas may be at risk of being hit during the next phase of hostilities.

Movement and access

The Erez and Kerem Shalom crossings with Israel remain closed due to hostilities. The referral of patients and their companions from the Gaza Strip to reach scheduled medical appointments in the West Bank and Israel have stopped since 7 October. People from Gaza working in Israel were not able to return to Gaza

The Rafah crossing with Egypt has remained closed for the movement of people and goods for the third consecutive day. On 9 and 10 October, Israeli forces carried out several air strikes near the Palestinian side of Rafah crossing, resulting in its closure.

Access to the sea has been prohibited by the Israeli military, and all fishing activity stopped since the hostilities began. Access within 1,000 metres from Israel's perimeter fence remained prohibited by Israeli forces, affecting Palestinian famers' access to large areas of farming lands, heightening the risk of food insecurity.

Humanitarian operations

On Thursday, the Humanitarian Country Team (HCT) launched a Flash Appeal for $294 million for 77 humanitarian partners to address the most urgent needs of 1,260,000 people in the oPt. It brings together the programming and funding requirements of the humanitarian community, including 13 UN Agencies, 29 International Non-Governmental Organizations (INGOs), 35 National NGOs (NNGOs) and the Palestine Red Crescent Society (PRCS). This Appeal was launched prior to the calls by the Israeli military to evacuate northern Gaza and therefore do not address the resulting humanitarian needs

All humanitarian agencies and personnel have faced major constraints in providing humanitarian assistance. The prevailing insecurity is preventing safe access to people in need and essential facilities, such as warehouses. At least 23 humanitarian staff, including 11 health workers and 12 UNRWA employees, have been killed since the start of hostilities. Operations have also been impeded by movement restrictions, the barring of imports, shortages of electricity, fuel, water, and other essential materials. The distribution of assistance to IDPs who are not in UNRWA shelters is particularly complex.

Despite these challenging conditions, humanitarian actors are working around the clock to support the most vulnerable. Mainly, this entails hosting IDPs in UNRWA schools, where basic food, medicine and support is provided to retain dignity and a glimmer of hope. Other interventions have included the distribution of food assistance to IDPs and emergency fuel to Water, Sanitation and Hygiene (WASH) facilities, the activation of psychosocial support helplines, and the launch of a mass media campaign to raise awareness about the risk of unexploded ordnance The reach of operations will remain limited without a humanitarian pause, an opening of the crossings, and significant funding.

WEST BANK HUMANITARIAN OVERVIEW

Casualties

In the West Bank, including East Jerusalem, confrontations between Palestinians and Israeli forces have continued for the seventh consecutive day. Since 7 October, 43 Palestinians, including eight children, were killed in the West Bank, including East Jerusalem. Of those, five were killed by settlers and 38 by Israeli forces.

Over 700 Palestinians, including 92 children. were injured by Israeli forces. Most of the injuries (over 600) were reported in various demonstrations.

Since yesterday evening, Israeli forces shot and killed 13 Palestinians, including four children and one woman. Most of the fatalities (10) were reported during confrontations that erupted in protests and marches in solidarity with residents of the Gaza Strip. One woman was killed, and her son was injured near Silwad (Ramallah), and another 16-year-old child was killed, and three others were injured near An Nabi Elyas (Qalqiliya) after Israeli forces opened fire at their vehicles for unknown reasons. One Palestinian man shot and injured two Israeli police officers in East Jerusalem before being shot and killed.

Settler-related violence

Settler-related violence across the West Bank, especially in Palestinian communities near Israeli settlements, has been on the rise. Since 7 October, a total of 63 settler attacks against Palestinians resulting in casualties or property damage, including some where Israeli forces were involved, have been recorded. This represents an average of nine incidents per day, compared with a daily average of three incidents since the beginning of this year.

In the past 24 hours, settler violence appears on the rise, particularly targeting herding and other Palestinian communities already at risk of forcible transfer. On 12 October, settlers attacked at least three such communities near Ramallah, in the South Hebron Hills, and in the Jordan Valley respectively, giving them ultimatums to leave their homes,

which has led to several families leaving.

On Friday, during a settler attack in At Tuwani village (Hebron), in video footage circulated by a human rights organization, an Israeli settler is seen shooting a Palestinian from zero distance and severely injuring him. An Israel soldier was standing in the background near the settler.

Attacks on health care

Since 7 October, the World Health Organization (WHO) has documented 42 attacks in the West Bank, 28 attacks involving obstruction to delivery of health care, affecting 20 ambulances; 20 involving physical violence towards health teams; eleven involving the detention of health staff and ambulances; and seven involving militarized search of health assets.

HUMANITARIAN NEEDS & RESPONSES

Protection

Priority Needs

- Psychological first aid (PFA) services, psychological counseling services and psychosocial/recreational/5,000 dignity kits.
- Need to increase documentation of violations of International Human Rights Law and Humanitarian Law.
- Supportive tools and devices such as crutches, wheelchairs, earphones, eyeglasses, etc., and medications for the elderly and people with disabilities.

Response to Date

- Child Protection (CP)/Mental Health Psychosocial Support (MHPSS) partners scaled up capacity of helplines and remote psychosocial support and referral to other services for children and their caregivers. This includes free remote (helpline, mobile, WhatsApp) PFA and psychosocial counseling.
- The United Nations Mine Action Service (UNMAS) has initiated an emergency mass media campaign through various platforms, including social media and radio stations, to send Explosive Ordnance Risk Education (EORE) and Conflict Preparedness and Protection (CPP) messages to as wide a population as possible.
- Providing family meeting services for children via conference calls.
- In the West Bank, the assigned MHPSS Focal Points for responding to settler violence triggers are continuing their MHPSS response as much as possible and the MHPSS Coordination Lead Focal Points at governorate levels are intervening as needed.

Shelter

Priority Needs

- Urgent need to provide services and basic Shelter and Non-Food Items (NFI) to Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs).
- Provision of shelter support in the form of NFIs and house maintenance for people displaced at urban centers and host families.
- Provision of shelter cash assistance for IDPs (reintegration package and belongings loss compensation) for at least 3,000 families.

Response to Date

- 270,000 IDPs are hosted at 102 UNRWA schools across Gaza Strip.
- ICRC/PRCS distributed 162 NFIs packs for displaced families in urban displacement settings, limited by movement restrictions.

Health

Priority Needs

- Addressing shortages of medical supplies impacting case management.
- Fuel for hospitals and ambulances is on the verge of running out.
- Urgent need to restock medical supplies from external sources due to the severe depletion in the local market.

Response to Date

- Partners continue to procure supplies from the local market to support hospital operations.
- Surge staff remain present in the hospitals supporting case management.
- Ambulances and emergency medical teams continue to operate despite the risk and difficult environment.

Food Security

Priority Needs

- Electricity, fuel and water sources to maintain internal food markets.
- Many shops now have supplies lasting less than a week, increasing urgency.
- Safe access to farms, livestock, fisheries and other food livelihood.
- Urgent import of fodder.

Response to Date

- WFP reached 175,486 displaced Gazans residing in UNRWA shelters with ready-to-eat fresh bread that WFP purchased from local bakeries.
- Initiating an assessment process to evaluate the effects of the escalation on urban female agripreneurs and family farmers.

Education

Priority Needs

- Safe access to schools and communities.

Planned Responses

- Provision of school-based psychosocial support and recreational activities for at least 70,000 children and school staff as soon as the situation allows.
- Emergency rehabilitation for at least 20 damaged schools, following a cluster rapid needs assessment.

- Provision of emergency supplies and learning kits to 10,000 children in DES and 50,000 children in schools once they reopen.

- Provision of catch-up classes, especially to displaced children (at least 20,000 child)

WASH (Water, Sanitation and Hygiene)

Priority Needs

- Provision of clean drinking water to the population.

- Provision of alternative power supply and 20,000 liters/day of emergency fuel to sustain the operation of WASH facilities, along with replenishing the chlorine supply for water treatment plants.

- Support to restore disrupted municipal services, including solid waste management, water, and sanitation operations, as appealed by the Gaza Strip municipalities.

- Delivery of essential WASH services and provisions to IDPs in collective centers, including drinking water and hygiene kits.

Response to Date

- 76,000 litres of fuel to support the operation of backup generators have been allocated for distribution among key WASH facilities.

Protection against sexual abuse and exploitation (PSEA) remains a cross-cutting priority for all clusters. The SAWA helpline, reachable at 121 and through WhatsApp at +972 59-4040121 (East Jerusalem at 1-800-500-121), operates 24/7. This toll-free number is widely disseminated across all areas of intervention to report cases of SEA and to facilitate emergency counseling and referrals for affected communities to access life-saving services. The PSEA Network is monitoring calls daily and will increase the number of counselors if necessary.